



General OM Resources

General Home Stay Etiquette

There are many ways to show courtesy and interest to your host family. Most importantly, as a guest in their home, you'll need to adapt to their customs—after all, that's how you discover what life is really like in their part of the world. Think about practicing the following behaviors like a true Ambassador.

Here are some “Dos” and “Don'ts” to keep in mind to help you make the most of this experience and to leave a good impression of Student Ambassadors with your hosts.

Do

- Expect things to be different. That's the whole point of the experience!
- Make your bed.
- Pick up after yourself.
- Offer to help out whenever possible.
- Participate in any activities.
- Follow house rules.
- Write a thank-you note to the home stay family. These can be left with the host or mailed from the next stop.
- Observe and notice as much as you can.
- Smile, smile, smile!

Don't

- Let nervousness interfere with your experience. Feeling nervous is normal. Keep a positive attitude and those nervous feelings will dissipate sooner than you think.
- Be too quick to negatively judge a behavior or activity. For example, drinking wine or beer with meals is the cultural norm for families in some countries. Smoking and rolling cigarettes can be common as well. This should not be cause for alarm.
- Make assumptions about your home stay family based on their ethnicity. Regardless of the country you're in, your home stay family could be of any ethnic background. Similar to America, many countries are ethnically diverse. Your home stay family could be of Indian, Middle Eastern/Arabic, or Asian backgrounds.

Keep in Mind

The following are important things to keep in mind while participating in a home stay experience. Remember, you are an ambassador representing your country and should always show the utmost respect and courtesy to your home stay family.

Rules

While with your host family, you will be expected to follow not only the rules of the People to People Student Ambassador Program, but also any ground rules set by the family. And remember, no matter what the family's habits, when you signed your Success Contract, you agreed not to drink, smoke, drive any kind of motorized vehicle, or use drugs. Families will understand, and you can always contact your leaders if you feel you're being pressured to break the rules.

Quiet

The noise level of your host family may not be the same as you're used to at home. Notice the volume in which your new “relatives” speak, listen to music, or play, and try to blend in.

Hours

Because you're a temporary member of your host family, you'll be expected to participate in their normal meals, transportation, and bedtime, even if they occur at unusual times for you.



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Conversation

Don't hesitate to ask your family questions about how they work and play, what's happening in their community, or how they think their country is different from yours. Your family agreed to host you because they want to share their culture. Questions and observations will show them that you're interested and intelligent.

Dining

The dinner table not only provides great opportunities for conversation with your host family, but is also your chance to display your winning table manners. Common courtesy dictates that you:

- Be on time for meals.
- Wait until someone from your family actually begins to eat before you begin.
- Lay your napkin on your lap.
- Keep your elbows off the table.
- Be aware of the quantity of food available and those yet to be fed before taking seconds.
- Try everything that's offered, even if it's only a small portion.
- Do not waste food.
- Make sure you know the policy about helping yourself to what is in the refrigerator.
- Be gracious and always thank your hosts.

Phone

Think of your host family's phone as a red emergency transmitter. Call your leader in case of problems, but otherwise avoid calling from the home stay (even locally) unless you are specifically invited to make a call using your phone card or charge card. It's not fair to saddle your hosts with a hefty phone bill after you're gone.

Showers

In some countries, water is a precious resource, often expensive. You should not take more than one shower per day and spend no more than five minutes in the shower. If it helps, you can turn the water on and off while showering; get wet and then turn off the water while you soap up, and then rinse off. This helps to save water.

Laundry

Plan to wash your things by hand, and ask if you can use a sink or tub. Some families may offer to do your laundry, but because of water scarcity as mentioned above, please don't ask to use their washing machine.

Clean Up After Yourself

You leave your family with a stellar impression of Student Ambassadors when you make your bed, hang up wet towels, and keep your room as neat as it was when you stepped in the door.

Surprise

Surprise your family with a desire to help out. Offer to help with dinner, do the dishes, walk the dog, etc.

Thank-You Note

Write a thank-you note before you leave your home stay. Put it in a spot where it will be found, such as on the kitchen table or a bed. You may wish to leave your gift(s) with the thank-you note, if you did not present it sooner.

Home Stay Gifts

It's customary when traveling internationally to bring a goodwill gift from your country to give to your hosts to say thank you for opening their home to you. Make sure you present the gift as you are leaving your home stay so your hosts won't feel obligated to return the favor. Keep the gifts inexpensive. You should spend no more than \$5.00. Try to make the gift meaningful as a way to remember you, such as items for which your hometown is famous, or something with the name of your city or state.